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SUBJECT: NEW MAOIST TACTIC: ATTACK INFRASTRUCTURE

REFERENCE: KATHMANDU 632

1. (SBU) Summary. In an apparent change of tactics, Nepal's Maoist insurgents have begun a systematic campaign of attacks against the kingdom's infrastructure. In recent days the Maoists have hit bridges - including one in the capital - telephone repeater towers, hydropower stations, electricity sub-stations, government buildings and Village Development Committee (VDC) offices. In two areas the Maoists have cut off drinking water pipelines to remote communities. The attacks make clear that the Maoists intend to cripple the government's ability to operate in the countryside even at the cost of severe hardship to the populace. End Summary.

Maoists Target Infrastructure

2. (SBU) Nepal's Maoists have apparently shifted tactics and embarked on a systematic campaign against the kingdom's infrastructure. In recent days they have targeted various types of tactical military targets, including bridges, hydroelectric and electrical power plants, telephone repeater towers, water supplies, government offices, and airports. [Note: We understand that next week EU Heads of Missions plan to release a press statement condemning Maoist attacks against Nepal's infrastructure, and calling on the Maoists to cease their attacks and pursue their objectives peacefully. End Note.]

Bridges Targeted

3. (SBU) Bridges are the most obvious example. During a March 30 attack, a bridge at Kumalgadhi on the Tulsipur-Surkhet road was damaged, cutting off the western part of Dang district - as well as adjacent areas of Salyan and Surkhet districts - from the rest of the country. During the night of April 1, Maoists struck three bridges in Bardiya district, including the Mankhola Bridge in the Nepalgunj-Guleria segment of the Nepal's main East-West artery, which links the airport at Nepalgunj with Royal Bardiya National Park. [Note: Bardiya district borders the state of Uttar Pradesh in India.] In Kathmandu on March 29, twenty-six people were injured when a bomb exploded in the middle of Kalimati Bridge, according to the Defense Ministry (Reftel). Five of the injured remain in critical condition.

Attacks on Telephone Repeater Stations

4. (SBU) Maoists have damaged more than 37 telephone repeater stations in 25 of Nepal's 75 districts. According to the Nepal Telecommunications Corporation, telephone service has been completely cut off in twelve districts: Achham, Lamjung, Darchula, Bajhang, Dhading, Solukhumbu, Rasuwa, Jajarkot, Rukum, Humla, Arghakhanchi and Gulmi. In other districts, communications links have been reestablished with the help of MART telephone lines, VHF telephone systems and trunk call sets. The Ministry of Information and Communications told us that they have not yet repaired the damaged repeater stations, and added that Nepal would need foreign technical assistance for that purpose.

Hydropower and Electricity Stations Vandalized

5. (SBU) Maoist attacks on hydropower and electric stations have disrupted power supplies in parts of the country. On March 9, the Maoists detonated a bomb at the Chandrauta electricity sub-station in the western Terai district of Kapilbastu, leaving most of the district without power. [Note: Power to some parts of this border district is supplied from India; these areas were not affected by the blackout.] The Maoists detonated a bomb at a hydropower project in Jhimruk, in mid-western Pyuthan district March 30. The resultant damage left Pyuthan, Gulmi and Rolpa districts in darkness. Similarly, Maoists bombed an electric plant in eastern Nepal's Panchthar

district April 2. The plant's generator and transmitter were completely destroyed, and the district headquarters and surrounding areas remain without power. The Nepal Electricity Authority's Managing Director informed us that in early March the Maoists damaged three small hydropower stations - one each in Bhojpur, Sankhuwasabha and Dhankuta districts. Maoists have reportedly threatened to attack these stations again if they are repaired.

Maoists Cut Off Water Supply

16. (SBU) Taking another chapter from the global insurgents' handbook, Maoists have cut off water supplies in two districts. The water supply to the headquarters (capital) of Okhaldhunga district was cut off after Maoists destroyed the intake mechanism at the source of the drinking water supply March 30. Insurgents cut off the water supply to Narayan municipality, Dailekh district, on April 2, by damaging the reservoir tank and pipeline. Reports indicate that local residents face a severe drinking water crisis.

Government Offices Sacked

17. (SBU) The Maoists have also stepped up their attacks on government facilities around the country. In Kailali district, Maoists March 30 bombed and burned the offices of the Agriculture Development Bank, National Commercial Bank and several post offices. In Nawalparasi district the rebels set fire to a branch office of the Nepal Electricity Authority March 31. The arsonists forced office staff to vacate the building before lighting the fire. In Dolkha district, Maoists raided the Border Administration Office and Customs Office in Lamabagar, a small town bordering Tibet, on April 2. In Rukum district on the same day, Maoists damaged the offices of a half-dozen government agencies as well as Care Nepal. They also damaged the airport tower. Also on April 2, Maoists attacked five area post offices and the veterinary and forest offices in Ramechhap district. In at least two districts in recent days the Maoists have torched health sub-posts, which in Nepal distribute medicines and basic first aid to villagers living in poor, remote areas.

Attack on Airport in Remote Dolpa District

18. (SBU) A Maoist bomb destroyed the airport tower in Dolpa district during the night of April 2. Army barracks nearby were also torched. Maoists struck the airport after the army contingent had returned to the district's headquarters. Dolpa is one of Nepal's most remote districts, with no road links with other parts of the country.

Fevered Attacks on Village-Level Offices

19. (SBU) The Defense Ministry reported that more than 50 Village Development Committee (VDC) offices across the country were destroyed in the past week. Thirty-seven of those were attacked in Dang district alone on the night of March 29, the Assistant Chief District Officer (CDO) for Dang confirmed. Between March 29 and April 2, Maoists attacked VDC offices in Chitwan, Pyuthan, Morang, Ilam, Baglung and Kailali districts. The District Police Office in Sindhuli confirmed that on March 30, seven of the districts' VDC offices were sacked by Maoists. The Maoists also destroyed four VDCs in Taplejung district and five in Myagdi district on April 2.

Comment

110. (SBU) These obviously well-planned and coordinated strikes against the nation's infrastructure were in part calculated to frighten the populace into observing the Maoists' planned general strike of April 2-6 (now postponed). However, they also give a clear indication that the insurgents' strategy has evolved. By attacking bridges, electrical power stations, communications towers and even the water supply, the Maoists have made it clear that they intend to cripple the government's ability to operate in the hinterland, even if it means inflicting severe hardship and economic deprivation on millions of Nepalese.

MALINOWSKI